

# Critical Thinking in Philippine Education: What We Have and What We Need<sup>i</sup>

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## **Abstract**

*One of the most prominent effects of globalization and the steady advance of capitalism is the increase in demand for skilled human capital. This is especially true in the Philippines, which relies on labor export in order to keep its economy afloat. Nonetheless, despite the demands of the globalized world, the Filipino children and youth should not only be sent to schools to be taught skills that would make them competent laborers for capitalist markets, but more importantly, they should be trained to become critical thinkers so as to be open, sensitive, and understanding of the beliefs and values of others as well as not to be enslaved by their respective belief and value systems. In this light, this paper discusses how critical thinking can be taught more effectively in education institutions in the Philippines through reconsideration of the Taxonomy of Learning Objectives and a push for Critical Pedagogy. I will argue that the Taxonomy is reductive and lacking in terms of developing critical thinking in students, whereas, critical pedagogy brings the children and the youth to the table of dialogue by teaching them how to raise and accept questions without the attitude of hostility, the latter being a characteristic of an uncritical and enslaved mind.*

**Keywords:** Critical Thinking, Taxonomy of Learning Objectives, Critical Pedagogy, Education, Power Struggle

## **Critical Thinking in Philippine Education**

### **Critical Thinking in Philippine Basic Education**

Education plays a vital role in the development of a child to become a critical thinker. Children are naturally curious and asking questions is like second nature to them. Thus, children can be trained to think critically the moment that they begin to ask questions. However, this means that a child's initial training in critical thinking does not begin at school, but at home. When a child enters Kindergarten at the age of five, only then can educators step in to continue (or, in most cases, to begin) the child's critical thinking education. This is when the role of education in the fostering of critical thinking begins.

A person's mid to late formative years (5 to 8 years old) are very crucial in the development of critical thinking; hence, basic education has the foremost responsibility to habituate children to think critically during the early grades. In the Philippines, basic education is spent studying Filipino, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Values Education, Music, Arts, Physical Education, Health, Home Economics, and Technology and Livelihood Education (*see* Department of Education website). The irony is that many of these subjects (as well as those courses taught in higher education) include the teaching of critical thinking in their respective curricula, and yet, many "educated" Filipinos remain to be uncritical. A possible explanation is that critical thinking is not being effectively taught in Philippine education.

Critical thinking can be taught to students when they are allowed to raise questions, explore possibilities and engage in meaningful discussions. This can be done through reflective teaching. The problem, however, is that teaching in the Philippines is constrained to the didactic approach and has barely enough room to be reflective. This may be because: a) teachers are guilty of the

misconceptions in teaching for thinking that were specified by Lipman (2003, pp. 64-80); b) the quantity of information given is prioritized over the development of critical thinking; c) didactic teaching is easier than reflective teaching considering all the other things that a teacher is expected to do (lesson planning, checking and grading of exams, etc.); d) many teachers are not used to the reflective approach; and e) the government is bent on producing skilled laborers more than critical thinkers. Despite these reasons supporting the didactic approach in teaching, there is obviously a need to make room for reflective teaching in every grade level and in all subject areas so as to facilitate the development of the critical thinking aptitude of Filipino students. This can begin by first establishing a common understanding of what “critical thinking” is.

### **What is Critical Thinking?**

One of the focal points of this paper is the concept of “critical thinking”. Nevertheless, before I can proceed any further, I must first clarify what I mean by the term “critical thinking” and show how this applies to Philippine basic education through Critical Pedagogy. I would like to begin by laying down the more common definitions of the term. A research report, titled, *Critical Thinking: A Literature Review* (Lai, 2011) proved helpful for this purpose.

One can derive a variety of definitions of critical thinking formulated by respective thinkers in the fields of Philosophy and Psychology. In philosophy, for instance, critical thinking is defined as:

- “the propensity and skill to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism” (McPeck, 1981, p. 8 in Lai, 2011, p. 6);
- “reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (Ennis, 1985, p. 45 in Lai, 2011, p. 6);

- “skillful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it 1) relies upon criteria, 2) is self-correcting, and 3) is sensitive to context” (Lipman, 1988, p. 39 in Lai, 2011, p. 6);
- “purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or conceptual considerations upon which that judgment is based” (Facione, 1990, p. 3 in Lai, 2011, p. 6);
- “disciplined, self-directed thinking that exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thought” (Paul, 1992, p. 9 in Lai, 2011, p. 6);
- “thinking that is goal-directed and purposive, ‘thinking aimed at forming a judgment,’ where the thinking itself meets standards of adequacy and accuracy” (Bailin et al., 1999b, p. 287 in Lai, 2011, p. 6); and
- “judging in a reflective way what to do or what to believe” (Facione, 2000, p. 61 in Lai, 2011, p. 6), among others.

Meanwhile, the discipline of psychology provides definitions of critical thinking such as:

- “the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts” (Sternberg, 1986, p. 3 in Lai, 2011, p. 8);
- “the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome” (Halpern, 1998, p. 450 in Lai, 2011, p. 8); and
- “seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims

be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth” (Willingham, 2007, p. 8 in Lai, 2011, p. 8), to name a few.

Hence, Lai (2011) points out that Philosophy and Psychology provide the bulk of the literature on discussions on critical thinking.

Meanwhile, critical thinking in Critical Pedagogy (hereafter referred to as CP) takes a, somewhat, different form from those that were aforementioned above. In CP, critical thinking serves as a transformative tool, which begins in the transformation of the individual and aims to culminate to the transformation of the society at large. CP is an approach to education that underscores the importance of transforming unjust power relations to emancipatory relations of power that help people become autonomous subjects. Through critical pedagogy, the objects of oppression – learners among them – are empowered to transform their society through education by enabling them to take control of every aspect of their lives. This is achieved by teaching students how to think critically. Thus, critical thinking is a vital aspect of critical pedagogy. “Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and, nation state” (McLaren, 1998, p.45). In other words, critical thinking here is not simply cognitive, abstractive, or procedural, but pragmatic and transformative.

Burbules and Berk (1999) offer an interesting comparison on how literatures on Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy views the term “critical”. They pointed out that the “Critical Thinking tradition concerns itself with criteria of epistemic adequacy: to be “critical” basically means to be more discerning in recognizing

faulty arguments, hasty generalizations, assertions lacking evidence, truth claims based on unreliable authority, ambiguous or obscure concepts, and so forth” (Burbules and Berk, 1999, par. 4). Whereas, the Critical Pedagogy tradition “regards specific belief claims, not primarily as propositions to be assessed for their truth content, but as parts of systems of belief and action that have aggregate effects within the power structures of society. [To be critical is to ask] first about this system of belief, and action, *who benefits?* The primary preoccupation of [being critical in] Critical Pedagogy is with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations” (Burbules and Berk, 1999, par. 5). It is worth noting, however, that in both traditions, “criticality” assumes a transformative role. In Critical Thinking, it is concerned with transforming false belief claims into truth, while in Critical Pedagogy, it focuses on transforming power relations in society.

Inspired by these diverse definitions, I would like to offer my own take on what critical thinking is. My definition, however, does not favor any particular discipline or tradition, but seeks to find a point of “dialogue” or “agreement” among these different but related perspectives on critical thinking.

### **Critical Thinking as a Questioning Attitude**

My definition is this: critical thinking is a questioning attitude directed at a thorough reconsideration, clarification, and validation of propositions, beliefs, or systems leading to a personal acceptance, rejection, revision, or development of the same. This definition is comprised of a number of factors such as: a) questioning, b) attitude; directed at a thorough c) reconsideration, d) clarification, and e) validation; of f) propositions, g) beliefs, or h) systems; leading to a personal i) acceptance, j) rejection, k) revision, and l) development, of the same.

In this definition, critical thinking is not considered as a skill because of instances wherein we employ the term “critical thinking skill”, which means the ability and/or proficiency in applying this questioning attitude. Seen under this light, I consider critical thinking distinct from critical thinking skill.

Furthermore, even without expressly mentioning it, thinking is implied in my definition since questioning cannot occur without thinking. In addition, suspension of judgement is also presumed since one cannot claim to be engaged in critically thinking about a certain subject matter if one has already prejudged the same. Finally, it goes without saying that this definition of critical thinking applies not only to the propositions, beliefs, or systems held by others but to those that one holds for oneself as well.

*Questioning.* Critical thinking must always begin with asking questions.

Admittedly, not all instances of asking questions – “What time is it?”, “How are you?”, “How’s the weather?” etc. – involves critical thinking, but still, critical thinking always begins with questions because only through asking questions can one arrive at: a) another question/s that could further the critical thinking process; b) tentative answer/s that can still be explored; or c) definite answer/s.

*Attitude.* The propensity for asking questions and exploring possibilities is essentially a state of mind – a disposition or tendency – without which, an individual is less likely to think critically. This explains why some people think critically more than others. Thus, critical thinking entails sustaining or rekindling and developing a person’s natural inclination to ask questions.

*Reconsideration.* The questioning attitude involved in critical thinking is not directed at finding definitive answers, rather, it is directed at reconsidering propositions, beliefs, or systems that appear or claim to be definitive. Therefore, when a person critically thinks, one necessarily reviews an existing viewpoint.

Even in research wherein one is expected to come up with an original idea, this “original” idea does not originate from a vacuum, but through a meticulous reconsideration of existing ideas.

*Clarification.* Propositions, beliefs, or systems may contain statements that are vague or ambiguous, which uncritical thinkers could accept by faith, interpret personally, or simply ignore. A questioning attitude, on the other hand, seeks to clarify extensively these statements – the meanings of words or phrases in relation to the context they are used – in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of these propositions, beliefs, or systems.

*Validation.* A significant degree of justification is sought by this questioning attitude before any judgment on whether a certain proposition, belief, or system ought to be accepted, rejected, revised, or reinforced. Requiring justification ensures that any claim that might be used as basis for other claims or actions is corroborated by sufficient evidence.

*Propositions.* A proposition is a statement that may either be true or false as well as the “thought” that the mind cognizes when expressed in a declarative sentence. To illustrate: two different sentences uttered by two speakers can have the same meaning. For instance, Mr. A’s statement that “That ball is red” holds the same meaning as that Ms. B’s assertion that “That is a red ball”. They are both saying the same thing though they uttered different sentences. This is also true with different languages. The German Ms. C’s claim that “Schnee ist weiss” is no different from the Englishman Mr. D’s utterance that “Snow is white”. There is understanding among advocates of propositions that whenever people speak of the same thing through different declarative sentences, there exists something in what each has said – and that something is a proposition (Marquez, 2014).



*Beliefs.* A belief is: a) propositional attitude, b) evaluative and affective attitude, and c) the object of the verb “to believe”. As a propositional attitude, a belief is an attitude towards a proposition, which is expressed in the form “A believes that p”. As an evaluative and affective attitude, belief is an attitude towards a person or “entity” other than a proposition, which takes the form “A believes in [person or “entity” other than a proposition]”. Whereas as an object of belief, belief is that which comes after the verb “to believe”, such as the proposition in belief-that or the person or “entity” in belief-in statements (for full discussion, see Marquez, 2014, pp. 32-42).

*Systems.* There are instances wherein beliefs build up on top of one another that they develop into complex systems and power relations such as those that can be found in governments (democracy, socialism, capitalism, etc.), religions (doctrines, practices, etc.), education (pedagogy, foundations, aims, etc.), and the sciences (methodology, evidence, etc.), to name a few.

*Acceptance.* Upon thorough reconsideration, clarification, and validation of a certain proposition, belief, or system, one may find logically compelling reasons to accept it.

*Rejection.* However, upon doing the same, one may ultimately find it unacceptable and decide to reject it.

*Revision.* Or perhaps, one may find certain parts acceptable while other parts in need of revision and decide to conduct the appropriate modifications that may lead to a “new” proposition, belief, or system.

*Development.* Finally, one may opt to build on a proposition, belief, or system that one has reconsidered, clarified, and validated in order to develop its

strengths and reinforce its weaknesses. In this sense, revision and development are deemed distinct from one another since the former pertains to the revision of the proposition, belief, or system being reconsidered, whereas the latter refers to the development of insights that were derived from a proposition, belief, or system that one has accepted.

If we are to look at the philosophical and psychological definitions that were presented in the previous section, one may observe that the definitions provided by McPeck, Ennis, Paul, Sternberg, and Halpern lack the clarity that should be supplied by a definition. Meanwhile, those that were provided by Lipman, Facione, Bailin, and Willingham carry common themes such as: criteria, methods, strategies, self-directed, self-corrective, contextual, and judgement. In this light, I believe that the definition that I have offered avoids the vagueness of the definitions given by McPeck, Ennis, Paul, Sternberg, and Halpern, while accommodating and building on the strengths of the definitions provided by Lipman, Facione, Bailin, and Willingham. Furthermore, the definition does not only deal with the conceptual (propositions and beliefs) but also with the social (systems) aspects of reality, which is central to CP. This is important in order to enable critical thinkers to be more “in touch” with the world and recognize the power struggle that surrounds them. With this definition in mind, I can now proceed with my discussion on critical thinking in Philippine education.

I believe that we can get this underway by, first, opening the minds of Filipino educators to the benefits of using the reflective approach in the development of critical thinking. Second, we have to win government support by showing that critical thinking is more valuable to nation-building than capitalism. And finally, in order to determine how critical thinking can be effectively taught to Filipino students, we must look into what we have and then, from there, lay out

what we need so as to provide opportunities to be didactic as well as reflective in teaching.

## **What We Have: Taxonomy of Learning Objectives in an Outcomes-Based Education Approach**

### **The Place of Critical Thinking in Outcomes-Based Education**

Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) appears to be the norm on education in different parts of the world today. As an approach to education, OBE centers on outcomes, that is, ensuring that student outputs meet the specified objectives of a particular course. Basically, “[o]utcomes are really no more than statements of intention, written in terms of student learning” (Killen, 2000, p. 5). This “statement of intention” usually takes the form: “By the end of the lesson, the student is expected to ... [outcomes]”. OBE is the education sector’s response to the overarching demand for quality assurance in a capitalist and globalized world.

Killen (2000) points out that OBE can be seen as: 1) a theory of education; 2) a systematic structure for education; and (3) a classroom practice. “We can think of OBE as a theory (or philosophy) of education in the sense that it embodies and expresses a certain set of beliefs and assumptions about learning, teaching and the systemic structures within which these activities take place” (Killen, 2000, p. 2). We can also think of OBE as a systematic structure of education wherein “it can provide administrators with some level of control over the outcomes of education, and at the same time provide teachers with a large degree of freedom to select the content and methods through which they will help their students achieve those outcomes. The control (or, if you like, the overall direction) will come through the specification of the syllabus objectives

and outcomes, and the freedom comes through the choices (about content, teaching methods and assessment) that are left up to schools and individual teachers” (Killen, 2000, p. 4). Finally, we can think of OBE as a classroom practice, which “fits very well with the common sense notion that children at school (or in any other educational situation) should be learning something, and that specifying just what that learning is to be ought to help students to achieve it” (Killen, 2000, p. 5). From these descriptions, it is not difficult to see that OBE is essentially an application of Bloom’s Taxonomy, especially with respect to numbers two and three.

Evidently, the “outcomes” in OBE are largely determined by the objectives that are specified in the curriculum of every course. Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, hereafter referred to as “Taxonomy”, serves a central role in determining these objectives. “The taxonomy of educational objectives is a framework for classifying statement of what we expect or intend students to learn as a result of instruction” (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 212). For this reason, OBE employs the Taxonomy in constructing course objectives to specify which skill/s the student has supposedly learned upon meeting a stated objective. However, this raises the question as to whether critical thinking can be taught to students through the use of the Taxonomy, because if it fails to teach students critical thinking, then the Taxonomy has missed the point of education.

In this regard, critical thinking is not necessarily developed among students even if the teacher ensures that the lesson plan includes all of the educational objectives that are laid out in the Taxonomy. The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking defines critical thinking as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication,

as a guide to belief and action” (Scriven and Paul, 1987 as cited in Criticalthinking.org, 2015, para. 3). This definition appears to have been met once all of the educational objectives in the Taxonomy are satisfied. However, my notion of critical thinking pertains to the questioning attitude of an individual towards propositions, beliefs, or systems before accepting, rejecting, revising, or developing them. This means that when a person thinks critically, one basically asks questions that aim to determine the truth or falsity of a proposition or belief. Critical thinking, in the form of questioning, I believe is the foundation of all the stages of the Taxonomy, yet is not bound by any of them.

In 2001, Krathwohl and his team published the revised Taxonomy. He later pointed out that critical thinking was not included in the revisions because it cannot be narrowed down to a single category. “Problem solving and critical thinking were two other terms commonly used by teachers that were also considered for inclusion in the revision. But unlike understand, there seemed to be no popular usage that could be matched to a single category. Therefore, to be categorized in the Taxonomy, one must determine the intended specific meaning of problem solving and critical thinking from the context in which they are being used” (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 218). Seen in this light, critical thinking arguably encompasses more than one category in the Taxonomy, yet, even if all of the categories are tapped in the objectives, this may not necessarily translate to teaching critical thinking because the idea of critical thinking, itself, is context-based. Consider the following portion of a welder apprenticeship course outline (*see* Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, 2007, p. 11ff):

**FIRST PERIOD TECHNICAL TRAINING  
WELDER TRADE  
COURSE OUTLINE**

*UPON SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THIS PROGRAM THE APPRENTICE SHOULD BE ABLE TO PERFORM THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES.*

**SECTION ONE: ..... SAFETY, TOOLS, WELD FAULTS AND OAW ..... 56 HOURS**

**A. Welder Apprenticeship Training Program Orientation (120101a).....2 Hours**

**Outcome:** *Describe the responsibilities and opportunities in the welding trade.*

1. Describe the apprenticeship training system in Alberta.
2. Identify the training profile of Welding Apprenticeship in Alberta.
3. Explain the Welder program outline learning outcomes and objectives.
4. Describe the responsibilities for the Contract of Apprenticeship by the apprentice, employer and Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training.
5. Identify industrial, commercial and construction fields that provide employment opportunities for welders.
6. Discuss the contents of the apprenticeship training Record Book.
7. Demonstrate the ability to complete an acceptable resume.

**B. Safety Guidelines (120101b) ..... 4 Hours**

**Outcome:** *Follow O H & S and WHMIS guidelines.*

1. Describe applications of the Workers' Compensation Act in the work place.
2. Demonstrate an ability to locate and interpret sections of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, General Safety Regulations as they apply to welding.
3. Explain the WHMIS program.
4. Describe the procedure for welding or cutting in confined spaces or on potentially dangerous enclosures.

**C. Welding Safety (120101c).....4 Hours**

**Outcome:** *Apply safe work practices and procedures when using welding and cutting equipment.*

1. Identify physical hazards that are common to welding and cutting equipment.
2. Identify use of personal protective equipment for welding and cutting operations.
3. Identify fire hazards and methods of fire.
4. Explain the hazards involved with welding fumes and gases.
5. Identify welding fume ventilation methods.
6. Identify use of personal protective equipment for hazardous and toxic materials.
7. Explain the effects of electricity and precautions used to prevent injury.

Supposing a student who has enrolled in this course has met all of the given objectives. Was critical thinking developed in the student? Not necessarily. Meeting all of the listed objectives does not ensure that the student will learn how to think critically. Critical thinking, in this instance, would be manifest when the student begins to question and verify the information that were handed down by the teacher or when the student tries to find other ways to improve on

the knowledge and skills that have already been taught. This, of course, entails questioning the self as well as questioning the more knowledgeable others – an act of dialogue, communication, and language – and to think through all the claims that have been made in relation to this questioning before accepting them to be true.

If we are to look at the hierarchy of thinking skills, namely: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, the two topmost levels are the ones that require critical thinking the most since they entail value judgement. Yet, if this is the case, the obvious question is: “Where in the preceding levels was critical thinking supposed to have been developed so that it can be used in the latter levels?” Thus, the question on whether critical thinking is learned when student output meets all of the categories laid out by the Taxonomy invites us to look into how this approach looks at the notion of “thinking”, as a whole.

### **Lower Order versus Higher Order Thinking**

The Taxonomy presents the thinking skills in a hierarchical fashion, which can be visualized as a pyramid. Furthermore, these levels of thinking are bifurcated in two – a lower level and a higher level. This means that in order to arrive at higher levels of thinking, one must be able to be skilled at the lower levels first, at least in the Original Taxonomy. “The categories were ordered from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. Further, it was assumed that the original Taxonomy represented a cumulative hierarchy; that is, mastery of each simpler category was prerequisite to mastery of the next more complex one” (Krahwohl, 2002, pp. 212-213). In the Revised Taxonomy, however, this overlap between the different levels was permitted. “The revised taxonomy also arranges skills from the most basic to the most complex. However, because skills such as understanding can be exercised on many levels, the developers

allowed categories to overlap. For example, understand is technically lower on the hierarchy than apply. However, the skill of explaining is more cognitively complex than executing, even though that skill is associated with a higher category. As a result, ‘the hierarchy is no longer considered cumulative,’ according to Krathwohl” (Munzenmaier and Rubin, 2013, p. 18).

The drawback of this presentation is that it leads one to think that human cognitive faculties work in a hierarchical or a “production line” fashion, wherein there are “stages” in the thinking process. While this may be true in the neural or micro level, the whole process happens almost instantaneously in the macro level. In the same way, learning cannot be simply construed to happen in rigid hierarchical stages – a criticism that can also be attributed to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. I mentioned Piaget here because I believe that the Taxonomy can only work in relation to Piaget’s cognitive development theory.

When an individual, for instance, who is in the late preoperational stage (7 years old) states the definition of matter, Bloom would say that the child is at the lower order thinking stage of remembering. Fast forward to 30 years later, the same individual – who is in the formal operational stage and who has now earned a doctorate degree in Theoretical Physics – articulates the complexities of Quantum Theory. Can it be said that the physicist is still at the lower order thinking stage in relation to the complexities of Quantum Theory that s/he has just explained? If yes, since the physicist merely stated what s/he remembers, then we can say that the application of the Taxonomy is dependent on the stage of one’s cognitive development. If not, since the difficulty involved in stating the intricacies of the Quantum Theory cannot be summarily dismissed as merely requiring lower level thinking, then we can argue that remembering is not exclusively lower level thinking. I am inclined to believe that it is the former,



and for this reason, it is trouble-free for many educational institutions to simply apply both theories because they seem to be considerably complementary with each other. However, outside this “relationship”, thinking is essentially far from being hierarchical, but more of oscillating among the different “levels” of thinking with varying speed and intensity. This is especially evident in conversations wherein the gap between responses only takes an average of 200 milliseconds long, thus, illustrating that active thinking occurs while listening to what the other person is saying at the same time (for full discussion, *see* Stivers, et al., 2009; Yong, 2016).

### **The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Its Detriments to Philippine Education**

It would be unjust not to recognize the fact that having learning objectives in education is helpful in terms of focusing on what students are supposed to learn. Employing learning objectives, at the very least, provides a system that complements a time-bound classroom setting education by specifying clearly what student should have learned by the end of the term or school year. However, as to how these objectives are used and to what ends or purposes may prove to be its very disadvantage. Let us look at the Philippine educational setting, for instance.

Broadly speaking, the Taxonomy is widely implemented in the Philippines today. One may observe that Philippine education is by and large influenced by capitalist interests. This means that students and graduates are geared toward replenishing the country’s labor force. For this reason, the quality and objectives of education are focused on skills training. Thus, educational objectives are formulated in relation to skills development.

By virtue of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum No. 46 (CMO No. 46) that was released in 2012, that is, “Policy-Standard to Enhance Quality Assurance (QA) in Philippine Higher Education through an Outcomes-Based and Typology-Based QA”, OBE was institutionalized in the country. Looking at the “Rationale for Enhancing QA” of CMO No. 46 series of 2012 (particularly sections 3 and 4, p. 2), one can see the unmistakable influence of capitalism on the objectives of Philippine educational system in the sense that it only specified the “engineering; information technology and computing; maritime education; accounting; and nursing” (sec. 2) professions as examples of disciplines that must meet national and international standards (notice that skilled workers in these professions are relatively in demand overseas); as well as puts emphasis on “educating quality leaders, thinkers, planners, researchers, technological innovators, entrepreneurs, and the much-needed work force to launch the national economy” (sec 3), which is evidently geared towards the production of laborers. In relation to this, in 2014, CHED released the “Handbook on Typology, Outcomes-Based Education, and Institutional Sustainability Assessment”, hereafter referred to as “Handbook”, to guide “HEIs on how to implement outcomes-based education” (CHED, 2014, p. 11). Annex 4 of the Handbook (*see* CHED, 2014, pp. 83-85) enumerates the recommended verbs that can be used in constructing learning outcomes, which were adapted from the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy.

In this light, one of the dangers in viewing thinking skills as stringently hierarchical is that education may simply be reduced to skills training since skills-based jobs rarely require a level of thinking that goes beyond Bloom’s so-called “lower order”. Another, and more appalling, danger is that it may develop the misconception that there are people who are capable of higher order thinking and there are those who are not. This can lead to sentiments that only those who are capable of higher order thinking should pursue further studies

while those who are not capable should pursue technical or vocational courses and merely settle for manual labor. Given these dangers, I would not venture into applying the Taxonomy unless to develop in the students the questioning attitude that is directed at examining the prevalent belief systems in order to transform them or reinforce them, as needed. This can be done by looking at the Taxonomy simply as a tool to develop a critical attitude and not as hierarchical levels of thinking – in other words, as a tool to facilitate critical pedagogy.

## **What We Need: Critical Pedagogy in Philippine Education**

### **Critical Pedagogy and Power Struggle**

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education that was mainly derived from Paulo Freire's critical theory and was developed by many subsequent thinkers. "Critical pedagogy is not about an a priori method that simply can be applied regardless of context. It is the outcome of particular struggles and is always related to the specificity of particular contexts, students, communities, and available resources" (Giroux, 2011, p. 4). The basic principles of critical pedagogy can be summarized as: a "critique of current conditions; a focus on transformation and emancipation; emphasis on the value-laden and political nature of education; and interest in culture, identity and subjectivity" (McLean, 2006, p. 94). Apart from these, critical pedagogy also especially zeroes in on power – especially political and economic power – since it is at the crux of the struggle among social classes.

[The] unequal social relation, where capital dominates over labor, structures all production practices and has only a single rationale, the creation of surplus value (profit) ... Therefore, the existing social structure of capitalism is motivated parochially by the generation of profit and thus workers of all colors, genders, sexualities, and religions can never be rightfully compensated for what their labor produces. For Marxists, the historic effort of workers to

end the inequality located at the point of production (exploitation), which exclusively benefits the capitalist class, is the basis of class struggle. (Viola, 2009, p. 9)

Critical pedagogy focuses on power due to the fact that power can be used either to oppress or to liberate, and in terms of the former, the status quo cannot be changed without some form of power to secure the latter. “Critical pedagogy takes as one of its central projects an attempt to be discerning and attentive to those places and practices in which social agency has been denied and produced” (Giroux, 2011, p. 3). Advocates of critical pedagogy, therefore, see education as a form of political power that may be utilized to end oppression. It may be raised, however, that although the intention of using education as a power is to liberate the oppressed, the liberator may possibly be transformed by power into an oppressor. “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority; still more when you superadd the tendency of the certainty of corruption by authority” (Dalberg–Acton, 1887, p. 9).

Despite the popularity of the said quote, the claim that it attempts to assert is very much difficult to prove. History has provided us with the likes of Hitler, Hussein, and Marcos who were corrupted by power and used it to oppress, but it has also given us Jesus Christ and Gandhi who used their power to help the oppressed, yet, were not corrupted by it. Thus, the evidence provided by history shows us that it is possible for people to overcome the corrupting tendencies of power, provided that they were prepared to handle it. “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (Freire, 2005, p. 44).

I believe that this is where critical pedagogy plays an important role in education. “To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that . . . comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred . . . that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students” (Hooks, 1994, p. 13). In teaching through CP, teachers open the minds of the students in order to entertain possibilities and respect differences by teaching them to listen, think, and speak, that is, to engage in dialogue. Critical pedagogy “draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning and illuminates the role that pedagogy plays as part of a struggle over assigned meanings, modes of expression, and directions of desire, particularly as these bear on the formation of the multiple and ever-contradictory version of the ‘self’ and its relationship to the larger society” (Giroux, 2011, p. 4).

### **The Role of Dialogue in Critical Pedagogy**

Earlier in this paper, I proposed my definition of critical thinking. I defined it as a “questioning attitude directed at a thorough reconsideration, clarification, and validation of propositions, beliefs, or systems leading to a personal acceptance, rejection, revision, or development of the same”, and proceeded on explaining each aspect of the definition. Unfortunately, critical thinking, in this sense, cannot be successfully communicated, taught, or transmitted to students without recognizing the importance of allowing avenues for dialogue. The role of dialogue is to enable the fostering of social equality by inviting people to sit around the table of negotiation. This means that people who engage in a dialogue are willing to hear and to be heard. More specifically, the role of dialogue is to break the culture or *theme of silence*, which is characteristic of oppression. “The theme of silence suggests a structure of mutism in face of the overwhelming force of the limit-situations” (Freire, 2005, p. 107). Thus, in an

oppressed society, people are only silent because they feel helpless and hopeless. In an oppressed society where helplessness and hopelessness permeate, people cannot develop a questioning attitude because they are not allowed to find their voice, speak their minds, and engage in critical reflection. “Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (Freire, 2005, p. 88) and the presence of a culture of silence in a democratic society indicates that there is something wrong.

In this light, the role of dialogue in critical pedagogy is to help people realize that the way towards their emancipation is through confronting their personal social conditions by thinking and talking about them as well as by recognizing the fact that they can do something to change it. “Language is a practice that constructs and is constructed by how language learners understand their social surroundings, histories, and their possibilities for the future” (Norton & Toohey, 2004, in Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011, p. 82). Since dialogue is a way for us to overcome the culture of silence, which is “a culture of acceptance, resignation and fatalism” (Vittoria, 2014, p. 110), it will help us face our inhibitions with having to do something regarding our situation. Furthermore, it enables critical thinking as a questioning attitude to begin to develop.

Thus, it is the responsibility of teacher education institutions to produce educators that are not afraid to establish a dialogical relationship with their students in order to develop them to become critical thinkers. “Dialogue is the encounter between men ... Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them” (Freire, 2005, p. 88). In my classroom, for instance, I discourage my students to address me using titles such as “sir”, “mister”, or “professor” and encourage them to call me simply by my first name. This is my

way to encourage critical thinking among my students and to create a culture that allows a questioning attitude. They are not to think of me as someone who will always be on the lookout if they are giving right or wrong answers but as a teacher-learner who learns with them (learner-teachers) as we philosophize in class. This approach is relatively new in the Philippines since Filipinos are very much hooked up on drawing respect from “power” signified by titles and ranks. The obvious criticism to this approach, however, is that the students may lose respect for me as their teacher and that they may not recognize my authority inside the classroom.

The strategy that I employ in order to setup this kind of culture in my classroom is based on rational dialogue. During the first day of class, when I announce to my students that they should call me by my first name instead of any title, I challenge them to justify why they should address me using titles instead of my name. If they fail to present a compelling argument, then there is no reason not to call me by my name. The reasons that were presented to me usually boil down to two main things: 1) because they do not want to be disrespectful, and 2) because I am their teacher. For the first reason, I usually ask them whether they intend to disrespect me by calling me by my name, whereas for the second reason, I ask them whether or not calling me by my first name changes the fact that I am their teacher. Of course, they would answer both questions in the negative. The point here is, my authority as a teacher does not reside on the titles by which the students call me, but in their recognition that I do have that authority. Since culture is “an activity in which people actually produce the conditions of their own agency through dialogue, community participation, resistance, and political struggle ...” (Giroux, 2011, p. 111), creating a culture wherein I discourage them from using these titles to address me, I believe, gives the impression that I am willing to dialogue with them despite the authority that comes with my position as their teacher.

Moreover, I tell my students that they are free to ask questions and share their thoughts at any time as long as they are related to the topic that we are discussing. Freire (1998) recognizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the autonomy of the learner, which is reflective of the respect that a teacher gives to oneself as an unfinished being. I make it a point to let them know that our class is a safe place for them to express their opinions about things and that our purpose is to analyze these opinions together to see if they are founded on sound arguments. This way, I do not impose my thoughts on them while, at the same time, give them the opportunity to consider every claim in a critical manner.

The problem with many teachers today is that they consider themselves as the repository of knowledge inside their respective classrooms and that any deviation by the students from what has been taught to them is wrong. I believe that this attitude by teachers begins to take root during their training to become educators. It is highly likely that their approach to teaching is similar to the approach that they have experienced from their teachers while they were still students. If this is true, then, teacher education institutions should adopt an approach that would enable in-training educators to be open to dialogue by setting up an environment wherein they can discuss thoughts with their professors instead of the latter merely handing down facts and figures to them. “To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (Hooks, 1994, p. 130).

An example of this is the “community of inquiry” wherein participants, in-training educators in this instance, engage in collaborative dialogue in order to arrive at truth. In the community of inquiry, the participants are free to agree



and disagree with one another without the fear of facing hostility or judgement. The role of the teacher is to guide the course of the discussion with very minimal input about one's opinions on the subject-matter being discussed. Through training in a community of inquiry, future teachers would not be afraid to be proven wrong in their beliefs, but would welcome any opportunity from students to re-evaluate and revise their beliefs through the latter's thoughts and questions in the course of rational dialogue. In other words, the community of inquiry deters the culture of silence by empowering its members to speak and helps avoid inflicting what Freire (2005) calls "narration sickness" to education.

### **Critical Pedagogy in Philippine Education**

If the notion of critical thinking that I am proposing will be taught to Filipino students, then one of the ideal and promising avenues to do so is through critical pedagogy. Introducing CP in the Philippine education system is possible, despite the traditional and conservative nature of our society, although it would not be easy. The question that we need to answer is: "will a nation stand up against oppression and welcome critical pedagogy if they do not feel oppressed at all?" Answering this question entails surmounting at least two challenges. The first challenge is to help majority of the Filipino people overcome their desensitized attitude towards their oppression and not become oppressors, themselves.

One may argue that Filipinos have already acted to liberate themselves from oppression that is why they elected President Rodrigo Duterte and that this is a sign that Filipinos are already becoming "critical". However, one may not see that this instance of being "critical" is not, in fact, being critical because it is a manifestation of how the nation is deeply interred in its Hispanic colonial past. People see Duterte as a political Messiah – in the same way that Jesus was perceived by many in his time – who will save them from the evils and

oppression of the ruling class. “There is a new religion that is sweeping the nation, and Rodrigo Duterte is its new messiah” (Evangelista and Curato, 2016, para. 17). In fact, in a news report published by local network GMA, it pointed out that “[i]n his first opinion column for Philippine Daily Inquirer, [Presidential Communications Office Secretary] Andanar compared his first meeting with Duterte in Davao City to when Jesus met the fishermen who would be his apostles at Galilee” (Macas, 2016, para. 2; see also Andanar, 2016). The point of critical pedagogy, on the other hand, is to develop the individual into someone who would work out one’s emancipation without necessarily relying on a “superhero” figure for liberation. Liberation, Freire (2005) argues, is a mutual process that needs to be pursued by both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Case in point: time and time again, the most overused word in political campaigns in the Philippines is “change”. Politicians have always promised change because the people have been clamoring for it since anyone can remember. Duterte’s slogan “change is coming” is an example of this and, indeed, change has come. News broadcasted in major local television networks have showcased drug pushers being killed, apprehended, or surrendering left and right. It can be expected that the lawful arrest and surrender of drug pushers will be applauded by many, but the reports of drug pushers being killed, whether by the police or vigilantes, or the “threats” being mounted against corrupt public servants, being tolerated by the public as if these oppressors deserved to be punished without due process seem to be surreal. In other words, from being oppressed by those who hold power – since the old government seems to tolerate them – many appear to be celebrating the fact that these oppressors are being oppressed by the new government. Only time will tell if the change that has come will turn out for the better or for the worse. Despite this, critical pedagogy teaches us that to be critical is to speak up even if the

tables have turned towards our advantage. The goal is not to shift the center of power from the oppressor to the oppressed, but to get rid of the culture of oppression, altogether. As Freire puts it: “In order for this struggle [for humanization] to have meaning, the oppressed must not ... become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (Freire, 2005, p. 44). If this is the case, then how would we, Filipinos, accept an educational philosophy that asserts speaking up against the oppressors of our oppressors?

The second challenge, therefore, is to convince the public that domination is not the key to social transformation. Domination is a product of power struggle wherein the strong overcomes the weak and oppresses them. However, Bizzell (1991) explains that there are three kinds of power: coercion, influence, and authority.

One sort of power might be imagined as exercised by A over B, regardless of B's consent or best interests. Here A uses B to benefit A, and there's nothing B can do about it. I will call this sort of power “coercion” ... A second sort of power might be imagined as exercised by A over B only with B's consent, which is given only if B is convinced that doing as A suggests will serve B's best interests. I will call this sort of power “persuasion” ... [A] third sort of power [is that] which I will call “authority.” Authority is exercised by A over B instrumentally in the sense that sometimes B must do what A requires without seeing how B's best interests will be served thereby, but A can exercise such authority over B only if B initially grants it to A. (Bizzell, 1991, pp. 56-57)

For Bizzell, “authority” is the sort of power that ought to be practiced since it is not simply based on force as that of coercion or on the assurance of serving one's best interests as that of persuasion, but on a trusting attitude that those

who rule will be just, impartial and will pursue the common good. Seen from this perspective, it is the role of the teacher to exercise one's authority to make the students, that is, the Filipino youth in this case, realize that the only way to free themselves from oppression is by "learning how to solve daily problems collectively and collaboratively" (Naiditch, 2010, p. 96).

Unfortunately, this kind of authority is slowly and systematically being taken away from teachers by a market-driven outlook on education. "Teachers are increasingly reduced to the status of technicians and denied any control over their classrooms or school governance structures" (Giroux, 2011, p. 153).

Whereas students are seen as investments for the job market, teachers are regarded as manufacturers of skilled laborers and schools as factories. There is much ado for technical skills training at the expense of educating students to think critically and helping them to become socially aware. For this reason, it is all the more important for teachers to strive to be "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1985) and to "engage in the hard work of debunking corporate culture's assault on teaching and learning, orient their teaching for social change, connect learning to public life, link knowledge to the operations of power, and allow issues of human rights and crimes against humanity in their diverse forms to occupy a space of critical and open discussion in the classroom" (Giroux, 2004, p. 77). The responsibility to become transformative intellectuals, of course, does not rest on the teachers alone, but also to students, parents, communities, and the government, all of which are collaborators in the struggle towards liberation.

It is through this collaborative effort that, perhaps, the cycle of oppression might come to an end. Filipino educators, therefore, should "strengthen their reserves in courage and intellectual power [so that] they can shape curricula and school processes [thereby] influencing the ideals and attitudes of the next generation"

(Counts, 1978, in Foley, Morris, Gounari and Wilson, 2013, p. 116).

Essentially, Filipino teachers, together with the rest of the citizenry, need to shape the Philippine educational system in such a way that would foster collaborative dialogue instead of divisive competition since “education should contribute to the expansion of human freedom and autonomy from the knowledge that it more often serves as a mechanism of social discipline and control, and that the balance between these possibilities is worked out through educational practice itself” (Amsler, 2010, p. 20). It is through this that critical thinking as a questioning attitude can be effectively and efficiently taught to Filipino students.

Ultimately, liberating ourselves and our oppressors is the challenge incumbent upon every Filipino. Yet, the obvious conclusion to our earlier question is that unless Filipinos become sensitive to their oppression and willing to act on it, critical pedagogy will only be seen as a threat to the status quo. Many Filipinos have been oppressed for a very long time that it is clearly difficult to make them see that using power to overthrow an oppressive government only to make oppressors out of themselves is futile in every way. However, there is still hope for the young. In order to free themselves from the manacles of oppression, we have to educate the Filipino youth to become critical thinkers and this can be achieved through a pedagogy that is critical, reflective, and reflexive, otherwise, nothing will change. And thus, only through emancipatory education can we achieve true liberation. The first step towards this end, I believe, is to introduce Philosophy in Philippine basic education, because Philosophy specializes in rekindling our speculative interest. This is important in order to enable Filipinos to speculate – to speculate about the possibility and the advantages of adopting critical pedagogy in the Philippine education system; to consider the possibility that this might be good for us, after all. Thus, apart from critical pedagogy, I am also arguing for Philosophy in basic education. But that is another story.

## Notes

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